

Documents on Diplomacy: Lessons

Siege of the Legations: The Boxer Rebellion

- Standard: I. Culture
II. Time, Continuity, and Change
III. People, Places, and Environments
V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
VI. Power, Authority, and Governance
IX. Global Connections
- Grade Level: 9–12
- Objectives: The student will:
- Relate documents to specific events during the Boxer Rebellion
 - Analyze interaction between foreign diplomats and Imperial China
 - Determine the effects of the Boxer Rebellion on China and the spheres of influence
- Time: 1–2 class periods
- Materials: Documents: **1899** *An Uprising Against Foreigners*
1900 *Dispatches from the Boxer Rebellion*
1900 *A Letter from Lou Henry Hoover*
- Resources: *Film Poster: 55 Days at Peking*
Song Lyrics: 55 Days at Peking
Collage: The Boxer Rebellion
Drawing: The Legation at Peking, 1900
Image: Lou Henry Hoover
- Materials: Access to highlighters or colored pencils
The movie, *55 Days at Peking*, or Youtube for clips (**Prescreen!**)
- Procedures:

Opening Activity

1. Have the resource, *Film Poster: 55 Days at Peking*, projected as students enter the room. Ask them to write their impressions of the picture, including the background images. Review the students' answers.

Note: This 1963 movie is the Hollywood romanticized version of foreigners under siege in Peking (Beijing) during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. The movie starred Charlton Heston, Ava Gardner, and David Niven. Foreign diplomats living in Peking had legations (embassies) in a walled section near the Forbidden City. The siege of the legations by the Boxers lasted 55 days until the arrival of an eight-nation relief force. The movie is available on DVD. (Always prescreen You Tube movie clips! (One of these has inappropriate comments superimposed on the screen.)

Activity 1: Introduction to the Boxer Rebellion

1. Provide copies of document, 1899: *An Uprising against Foreigners*.
2. Explain that Edwin Conger was the U.S. Envoy Extraordinary & Minister Plenipotentiary (Ambassador). Pekin was used to mean Peking (Beijing).
3. Have students read the document and answer these questions:
 - a. What problems had the northeast region of Shantung experienced?
 - b. List the foreign countries mentioned in Conger's dispatch.
 - c. Who were the Boxers?
 - d. What actions had the Boxers taken?
 - e. How did religion factor into the uprising?
 - f. Describe the diplomatic efforts between Conger and the *Tsungli Yamen*.
 - g. If you were Secretary of State John Hay, how would you have reacted to Conger's message? What would you have done?
4. Discuss the document.
5. If additional information about the Boxer Rebellion is necessary, refer to:
 - www.smplanet.com/imperialism/fists.html
 - www.history.navy.mil/faqs/86-1.htm

Activity 2: The Siege of the Legations

1. Provide the resource, *Song Lyrics: 55 Days at Peking*. The song was played in the movie as U.S. Marines, part of an international force of 435 men, marched to the Legation Quarter. They were sent in response to the Boxer uprising to join the embassy guards for protection of the walled Quarter. These men fought off the Boxers during the siege until a larger force arrived.
2. Go to You Tube and play "55 Days at Peking Musical." The movie was NOT a musical but had a popular sound track. This video uses the song, *55 Days at Peking* while primary sources—photos and art—show the story of the rebellion.
3. Describe the story told by the lyrics and pictures.
4. Distribute these resources to students:
 - *Collage: The Boxer Rebellion*
 - *Drawing: The Legation at Peking, 1900*
 - Document: *1900 Dispatches from the Boxer Rebellion*
5. Students may work in pairs or groups.

- 6.** Have students place *Drawing: The Legation at Peking*, in the center of the desks. This will be the focus for the gathering of information.
- 7.** Students should imagine the Legations surrounded by the Tartar Wall functioning as a small city prior to the rebellion. There were parties, bands played, people strolled along the streets, and the most favored invitation was to the British Legation with its impressive buildings, tennis courts, and large dance floor. The British Minister, Claude McDonald and his wife, were considered perfect hosts.
- 8.** Read the document, *Dispatches from the Boxer Rebellion*. As students read, highlight or color the places mentioned in the document on the Drawing. How does the Drawing assist in their impressions of life during the siege?
- 9.** Correlate the *Collage and Image: Siege of the Legations* with the reading.
- 10.** Discuss the students' findings about the siege based on readings and pictures. Have them describe what life was like inside the walled city during the siege? Relate to Capt. John Myer's Drawing when appropriate. Compare and contrast their accounts.

Activity 3: Creation of a Movie Promo

- 1.** Have students (in pairs or groups) demonstrate their KNOWLEDGE of the Boxer Rebellion and the Siege of the Legations with the creation of a movie promotion package that will contain the following:
 - a.** List of main characters (and cast of movie stars to play them)
 - b.** A rough sketch of the movie promo poster for theatre display or the cover of the DVD release. Students can refer to the *Collage* and the original (but outdated) movie poster for ideas.
 - c.** A plot summary for use online as a descriptive advertisement for the film and later use for online sale or rental.
 - d.** Retain the movie title, *55 Days at Peking*, or create a new one.
 - e.** Will they use the original song, *55 Days at Peking*? If not, what song will they substitute?
- 2.** If class time is limited, assign the Movie Promo as an individual homework assignment.
- 3.** Have students share their creations. Do they include the principal characters? How revealing are the plot summaries? Is there enough history in the summaries? Do they romanticize the Rebellion as the 1963 version of the movie did? Do they resort to stereotypical images as was done in 1963? How would they have handled the promo package if asked to create a documentary instead of a feature film?
- 4.** Have the class select the best casting, best poster/DVD cover, best plot summary, and best song.

Extension Activities:

Provide the account of the siege in Tientsin (Tianjin) as described by future First Lady Lou Henry Hoover in *1900: Letter from Lou Henry Hoover*. Her photos, one taken on her wedding day (which was the day before her departure for China) and later as First Lady, are included for students. Have students compare and contrast her letter with the telegrams sent by Ambassador Edwin Conger in Peking. What are the students' impressions of Lou Henry Hoover? Would they have liked to be with her during the siege? If they were Evelyn Wight (the recipient of the letter), how would they have responded to Lou? ■